

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----099527 211004Z /11

R 201520Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6523
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 0368

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: LE PBOR SY IS PLO
SUBJ: THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON - WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

1. SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH SOUTH LEBANON REMAINED RELATIVELY CALM FOR SEVERAL MONTHS FOLLOWING LAST SEPTEMBER'S CEASE-FIRE, IT HAS BEGUN TO HEAT UP AGAIN, REMINDING US THAT THE AREA IS STILL A TROUBLE SPOT. THE SADAT INITIATIVE HAS CHANGED THE GIVENS OF THE PROBLEM AND NONE OF THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS DISCUSSED BEFORE NOVEMBER 19 OFFERS MUCH HOPE OF ALLEVIATING THE PROBLEM NOW. LEBANESE ARMY OCCUPATION OF NABATIYAH AND MARJAYUN MIGHT BE FEASIBLE, HOWEVER, AND MIGHT HELP TO STABILIZE THE SITUATION A LITTLE. END SUMMARY.

2. ALTHOUGH OUR SOMETIMES FRANTIC NEGOTIATIONS OF LAST FALL DID NOT LEAD TO IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA III, SOUTH LEBANON DID ENJOY THREE MONTHS OF RELATIVE CALM. THIS WAS SHATTERED IN EARLY JANUARY BY A RESUMPTION OF ARTILLERY EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND PALESTINIANS. ALTHOUGH WELL BELOW THE PRE-CEASE-FIRE LEVEL, THERE ARE FEW CONTROLS OVER THE SITUATION AND WE COULD BE BACK TO THE LEVELS

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OF LAST SUMMER WITH LITTLE DIFFICULTY. THE AREA IS STILL A TROUBLE SPOT AND THE POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER ESCALATION IS THERE.

3. SHTAURA III WAS WELL ON THE WAY TO THE ICE BOX EVEN BEFORE SADAT'S HISTORIC VISIT TO JERUSALEM ON NOVEMBER 19, BUT HIS INITIATIVE WAS THE COUP DE GRACE.

PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL HAS BECOME ALL BUT UNTHINKABLE TO THE PALESTINIANS, AND THE SYRIANS ARE EVEN LESS ANXIOUS TO PRESSURE THEM THAN THEY WERE BEFORE. SHTAURA III AND OTHER ALTERNATIVES, PRINCIPALLY THE USE OF UN TROOPS, HAVE BECOME EVEN LESS VIABLE TODAY THAN THEY WERE THREE MONTHS AGO. THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY/EXAMINATION OF THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE AREA AND OF VARIOUS REMEDIES, EVEN THE MOST UNLIKELY, IN AN EFFORT TO FIND A NEW ALTERNATIVE APPROACH.

4. THE PRESENT SITUATION IS AS FOLLOWS:

A. PALESTINIAN FIGHTING GROUPS OF ALL IDEOLOGICAL STRIPES REMAIN CONCENTRATED IN LEBANON SOUTH OF THE "RED LINE." THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT IN RECENT WEEKS THEY HAVE RECEIVED HEAVY NEW SHIPMENTS OF MUNITIONS THROUGH THE PORTS OF SIDON AND TYRE, AND THEY ARE THEREFORE PROBABLY SOMEWHAT STRONGER THAN JUST TWO MONTHS AGO.

B. LEBANESE GOVERNMENT FORCES, WHICH DEPLOYED IN TOKEN CONTINGENTS IN CERTAIN URBAN CENTERS (SUCH AS AT THE BARRACKS AT NABATIYAH) IN LATE 1977, REMAIN UNABLE TO IMPOSE A LEBANESE SOLUTION BY FORCE, OR EVEN ONE BASED ON A GENERAL UNDERSTANDING WITH ALL THE OTHER
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PARTIES INVOLVED. (THEY WERE NOT EXPECTED TO.)

C. SYRIAN ADF FORCES, WHICH HAVE ESTABLISHED ORDER ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY, ARE NOT PERMITTED IN THE SOUTH (ALTHOUGH THERE ARE A FEW SYRIAN-DOMINATED PALESTINIAN "SAIQA" ORGANIZATION FORCES IN THE AREA.)

D. THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES, WHILE WEAK, CONTINUE TO CONTROL CERTAIN KEY POINTS, (INCLUDING MARJAYUN, QULAYA, AYN IBL, ALMA ASH-SHAAB). "LEBANESE FRONT" MILITIA ELEMENTS IN BEIRUT UNDER BACHIR GEMAYEL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THEM TO THE EXTENT THAT ISRAEL PERMITS, AND TO DREAM OF "LIBERATING" SOUTH LEBANON WITH ISRAELI SUPPORT.

E. THE ISRAELIS STILL HAVE SIZABLE FORCES ON THEIR SIDE OF THE LEBANESE BORDER CAPABLE OF UNDERTAKING AT VERY SHORT NOTICE VERY LARGE-SCALE MILITARY OPERATIONS ON THEIR OWN, INCLUDING AT LEAST TEMPORARY OCCUPATION OF THE ENTIRE AREA. AT PRESENT, THEY ARE CONTINUING TO SUPPLY, ASSIST AND MOTIVATE THEIR PROXY LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES ON THE GROUND, BUT SEEM TO BE

EXERCISING RESTRAINT.

5. THE POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OF THE FIVE INVOLVED PARTIES (SYRIANS, PALESTINIANS, ISRAELIS, LEBANESE CHRISTIANS AND GOL FORCES) REMAIN UNCHANGED, WITH A SINGLE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE: THE SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS, BECAUSE OF THE SPLIT WITH EGYPT, NEED EACH OTHER MORE THAN EVER BEFORE AND ARE COOPERATING MORE CLOSELY. IT IS THEREFORE INCONCEIVABLE, FOR THE TIME BEING, THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD BE WILLING TO PRESSURE THE PALESTINIANS TO WITHDRAW FROM SOUTH LEBANON. IT IS EQUALLY INCONCEIVABLE THAT THE PALESTINIANS WOULD BE WILLING TO VENTURE A UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL AT THIS TIME SINCE IT WOULD APPEAR, MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, AS A WITHDRAWAL
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UNDER HOSTILE PRESSURE.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 201520Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6524
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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6. OVER THE PAST YEAR, A NUMBER OF PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN PUT FORWARD TO "SOLVE" THE PROBLEM OF SOUTH LEBANON; NONE OF THEM SEEM LIKELY TO WORK NOW.

A. IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA III HAS BECOME A

MIXED DESIDERATUM FOR THE GOL BECAUSE IT COULD DRIVE SOME PALESTINIANS NORTH INTO THE LOWER SHUF AND BEIRUT AREAS WHERE THEIR PRESENCE MIGHT TOUCH OFF AN ALREADY INFLAMMABLE SITUATION. IN ANY CASE, THIS IS NOT A REAL OPTION SINCE ALL REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE SYRIANS ARE NO LONGER PREPARED (IF THEY EVER WERE) TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE PALESTINIANS TO WITHDRAW FROM SOUTH LEBANON AND THE PALESTINIANS THEMSELVES ARE EVEN MORE DETERMINED TO STAY WHERE THEY ARE UNTIL THE RESULTS OF THE PRESENT ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS IS CLEARER.

B. THE DISPATCH OF UN TROOPS INTO THE AREA MAY POSSIBLY BE USEFUL AND PRACTICABLE AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE, BUT THERE SEEMS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD AGREE TO SUCH A MOVE NOW OR THAT THE UN WOULD BE WILLING AND/OR ABLE TO ORGANIZE AND DISPATCH SUCH A
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FORCE ANY TIME SOON IN THE ABSENCE OF PALESTINIAN COMMITMENT TO WITHDRAW.

C. AN ISRAELI CLEAN-UP OPERATION IN LEBANON SOUTH OF THE LITANI MAY LOOK LIKE AN ATTRACTIVE OPTION TO SOME ISRAELI MILITARY PLANNERS, BUT IN FACT IT WOULD SOLVE NOTHING. THE PALESTINIANS WOULD LOSE SOME MEN AND SOME EQUIPMENT, BUT THEY HAVE PLENTY OF BOTH AND THOSE THAT ARE LEFT WOULD BE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO CAUSE TROUBLE ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON. SUCH AN ATTACK WOULD OF COURSE RUIN THE CLIMATE FOR NEGOTIATIONS AND WOULD ALSO PUT THE GOL IN A VERY EMBARRASSING POSITION.

D. THREE MONTHS AGO AN ADF OCCUPATION OF NABATIYAH AND TYRE LOOKED LIKE A WAY OF STABILIZING THE AREA. TODAY, IN THE WAKE OF THE SYRIAN-PLO RAPPROCHEMENT FOLLOWING THE SADAT INITIATIVE, IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THE SYRIAN-DOMINATED ADF WOULD EXERCISE MUCH RESTRAINT OVER PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH LEBANON, EVEN IF THE ISRAELIS PERMITTED THEM TO GO THERE, WHICH THEY WON'T.

7. THE ONLY ACTION WE CAN THINK OF THAT HAS ANY CHANCE OF SUCCESS AND WOULD PERHAPS BRING A MODICUM OF STABILITY TO SOUTH LEBANON WOULD BE THE ADVANCE OF LEBANESE ARMY FORCES LOYAL TO SARKIS AND KHOURY TO NABATIYAH AND MARJAYUN. IT SEEMS TO US POSSIBLE THAT SARKIS MIGHT BE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE A DEAL WITH ARAFAT AND THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS WHEREBY THE LEBANESE ARMY WOULD TAKE REAL CONTROL OF THE MILITARY CASERNES IN THESE TWO TOWNS. THE PALESTINIANS IN THE NABATIYAH AREA WOULD BE REQUIRED TO WITHDRAW FROM THE TOWN AND

TURN OVER TO THE LEBANESE ARMY RESPONSIBILITY FOR
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MAINTAINING PUBLIC ORDER AND CIVIL ADMINISTRATION.
THE SAME SORT OF ARRANGEMENT WOULD BE MADE WITH THE
LEBANESE FORCES UNDER MAJOR HADDAD IN MARJAYUN, WHO
COULD PERHAPS BE REINTEGRATED INTO THE LEBANESE ARMY.
IF SUCCESSFUL, THIS SMALL STEP WOULD REDUCE THE
PALESTINIAN ARMED PRESENCE IN A SENSITIVE AREA AND IT
MIGHT STOP THE FIGHTING WHICH HAS FLARED UP AGAIN
SINCE THE FIRST OF THE YEAR. IT WOULD CERTAINLY GIVE
SARKIS' GOVERNMENT A BOOST IF HE COULD BRING SOME
STABILITY TO EVEN A SMALL PORTION OF THE SOUTH.

8. EMBASSY RECOMMENDATION. WE BELIEVE THIS IS THE
LEAST UNREALISTIC AND MOST POSITIVE OPTION NOW OPEN.
ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO ILLUSIONS THAT IT WILL BE EASY TO
WORK OUT SUCH AN AGREEMENT WITH ALL PARTIES CONCERNED,
WE BELIEVE IT IS WORTH DISCUSSING WITH BOUTROS.
I THEREFORE PLAN TO RAISE IT WITH HIM DURING
OUR NEXT MEETING. WILL REPORT RESULTS.
PARKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT00368
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780032-0701
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780142/aaaabjgo.tel
Line Count: 250
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: fa29c7e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3743880
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON - WHAT IS TO BE DONE?
TAGS: PBOR, MOPS, LE, SY, IS, PLO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/fa29c7e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014